MYRIAM · CYR

LETTERS OF A PORTUGUESE NUN

Uncovering the Mystery Behind a 17th Century Forbidden Love

A HISTORICAL MYSTERY

(IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER ACCORDING TO HISTORICAL CONTEXT)

I

(Mariana's first letter is written while Chamilly is still in Beja, preparing to leave.) circa November–December 1667

Love, consider well your lack of foresight. Ah! Unfortunate love! You were betrayed and you betrayed me with false expectations. A passion that held such sweet promise now brings a mortal despair more cruel than the absence that provokes it.

Ho! This absence for which my pain, ingenious as it is, can not find a name bleak enough, will thus deprive me forever of looking at those eyes wherein I saw such love, eyes that filled me with ecstasy, that were all manner of things and were for me enough? Alas, mine are deprived of the only light that made them sparkle; all they have left are tears and they do nothing but cry relentlessly since I learnt you[1] were finally resolved to leave, a parting so unbearable it will surely hasten my death.

Yet I find myself rather attached to the unhappiness caused by you alone. My life was yours from when first I saw you and I take some pleasure in sacrificing it to you. A thousand times a day I send my every sigh to find you. They seek you

out in every place but their reward for all this worry is but too sincere a warning brought on by my misfortune that cruelly forbids me to flatter myself and that tells me at all times; Cease, cease, unfortunate Mariana, to be consumed in vain, and to look for a lover you will never see; he crossed the ocean to flee from you, he is in France surrounded by life's pleasures, he thinks nothing of your pain. He dismisses and exempts you from fits of passion for which he is not grateful.

But no, I cannot bring myself to judge you so harshly. I want too much to excuse you. I do not want to believe you have forgotten me. Am I not miserable enough without tormenting myself with false suspicions? And why should I try and forget all the cares you took to show me your love? I was so charmed by your attentions that I would be ungrateful if I did not love you with the same excesses my passion gave me when you would grant me yours. How can it be that the memories of such pleasurable moments have become so cruel? And why must they, against their very nature now serve to tyrannize my heart?

Alas! Your last letter reduced it to a peculiar state: its pounding was so extreme it made, so it seemed, efforts to leave my body and go find you; I was so overcome by all these violent emotions that I remained abandoned by my senses for more than three hours; I stopped myself from returning to a life I must lose since I cannot keep it for you; at last, despite myself, I saw light. I flattered myself thinking I was dying of love; besides I felt relief, believing I would no

longer have to witness my heart being ripped apart by the pain of your absence.

Following these events I suffered various indispositions; but can I ever be without ills if I do not see you? Nonetheless, I suffer them in silence for they come from you. How can this be? Is this my reward for loving you so tenderly? What does it matter, I am resolved to worship you all my life, and to see no other, and I can assure you that you would do well to do the same. Could you be satisfied with a passion less ardent than mine? It may be you will find greater beauty (though you once told me I was somewhat beautiful) but never will you find such love and all the rest is nothing. No longer fill your letters with useless things and no longer write I should remember you. I cannot forget you, nor forget you gave me hope you would come and spend some time with me. Alas, why not all your life?

Were it possible for me to leave this miserable cloister I would not await the outcome of your promises in Portugal. Without measure or precaution, I would go and find you, follow you and love you through all the world. I dare not think this possible. I dare not feed a hope that would surely give me some pleasure and I want only to be sensitive to pain.

Still I must confess. The opportunity my brother gives me to write has caused me some unexpected joy and has suspended for a time the agony I am in. I beseech you to tell me why you were so determined to charm me as you did, when you knew well you must abandon me. And why were

you so bent on making me unhappy? Would that you had left me in peace in my cloister! Had I committed against you some injustice? Forgive me, I do not blame you. I am in no state to think of vengeance and I blame only the harshness of my fate. I find that in separating us, fate wronged us more than we could fear; it will not know how to separate our hearts, love which is more powerful has bound them together for all of our life! Should mine still hold some interest write to me often. I well deserve you take some care to send me news of your heart and of your circumstances; but mostly come and see me.

Adieu. I cannot leave this page, it will fall into your hands, would that I had the same good fortune. Alas! fool that I am, this cannot be. Adieu, I can bear no more. Adieu, love me always and make me suffer even greater woes.

II

(Written to Chamilly while he is stranded in the Algarve.)
circa December 1667 or early January 1668

Your lieutenant tells me at present that a storm has forced you to moor in the kingdom of the Algarve. I fear you may have suffered much at sea, and this apprehension has occupied me so that I have quit thinking of my pains. Are you quite sure your lieutenant takes greater care than I in all that happens to you? Why is he better informed and finally why have you not written to me!

I am most sad if you found no occasion since your departure, and even more so if one was found and you did not seize it; the injustice you do me and your ingratitude are extreme: but I would despair if they brought you some misfortune, and I much rather they remain unpunished than if I were avenged. I resist all appearances that should persuade me that you do not love me, and I feel much more inclined to blindly give way to my passion than to the reasons you give me to complain of your lack of care. How you would have spared me worries, had your ways been as languishing the first days I saw you as they have seemed to me of late! But who would not have been deceived, as I, by so many attentions and to whom would they not have seemed sincere? How difficult it is to bring oneself to question at length the good faith of our loved ones!

I can see that the poorest excuse suits you, and without your taking care to make any, the love I have for you serves you so faithfully I consent to find you guilty only so that I may delight in the pleasure of defending you myself.

I was consumed by your assiduities, your exuberance inflamed me, your kindness fascinated me, you won me with your vows, I was seduced by my own violent inclination, and what follows such sweet and joyful beginnings are but tears, and sighs, and a grievous death for which I find no remedy. It is true I found surprising pleasures in loving you, but they cost me strange sufferings and all the stirrings that you cause me are extreme.

Had I stubbornly resisted your love, had I caused you to feel dejection or jealousy to inflame you further, had you noticed some careful artifice in my conduct, had I at last wanted to oppose my reason to the natural inclination I have for you, which you quickly pointed out to me (though my efforts would have most certainly been in vain), you could punish me severely and make use of your power. But you appeared loving before telling me you loved me; you protested a great passion, I was charmed, and I succumbed to loving you passionately. You were not blinded as I was. How then could you suffer my being driven to this state.

What use could you make of my fits of passion that could only irk you? You knew you would not be forever in Portugal, why then have chosen me to render so unhappy? You would have found, no doubt, in this country, some

woman more beautiful, with whom you would have shared as many pleasures, since you sought only coarse ones. She would have loved you faithfully for as long as she saw you. Time would have cured her of your absence, and you could have left her without deceit or cruelty. Your behavior is more that of a tyrant, fond of persecution, than that of a lover who must think only of pleasing. Alas! Why do you inflict such rigors on a heart that is yours. I see well how easy it is for you to let yourself be turned against me as it was for me to let myself be convinced in your favor. I would have resisted greater reasons than those that forced you to leave me, without having to use all my love or without thinking I was doing some extraordinary thing. Any reason would have seemed weak and none could have torn me away from you; but you wanted to take advantage of the pretexts you found for returning to France; a ship was leaving; why not let it leave? Your family had written; do you not know all the persecutions inflicted by my own? Your honour begged you to forsake me; did I have any care of mine? You were obliged to go and serve your king; if all that is said of him is true, he does not need your help and he would have excused you.

I would have been too happy had we spent our lives together, but since a cruel absence separates us, it seems that I must be content with not being unfaithful and I would not, for all the world, commit so dark a deed.

What! You knew the depth of my love and of my tenderness and still you could resolve to leave me and forever

expose me to the fear that I am bound to have thinking you will remember me only to sacrifice me to some new passion? I can see that I love you like a mad woman; but I do not complain of the violent movements of my heart, I am getting accustomed to its persecutions and I could not live without the joy I am discovering of loving you amidst a thousand sorrows: I am forever persecuted with extreme annoyance by a hatred and disgust for all things; my family, my friends, this convent are insufferable to me; all I am required to see and all my obligations seem odious to me. I am so fond of my passion that it seems that all my actions and all my duties have only to do with you. Yes, I feel guilty if every moment is not yours. Alas! What would I do without such hate and such love to fill my heart? Could I survive not being incessantly consumed, and lead a life tranquil and languid? This emptiness and insensitivity is not for me.

Everyone has noticed the entire change in my humor, in my manners and in myself, Mother Superior has spoken of it to me sharply at first and then with some kindness; I do not know what it is I answered her, it seems I confessed everything to her. The strictest nuns have pity on my state, it even provides them with some consideration and some care for me. Everyone is touched by my love, while you remain in a state of profound indifference, writing me only icy letters, full of repetitions—half the paper is empty, and I can see that you are dying to have them finished.

Dona Brites harassed me these last few days to make me leave my room and thinking she would distract me, she took me strolling on the balcony from which we can see Mertola;[2] I followed her, and was immediately struck by a cruel memory that made me cry the rest of the day; she brought me back, and I threw myself on my bed where I thought a thousand times on the little hope I see of ever recovering. What they do to allay me sours my pain. I find in the remedies themselves further reasons to afflict me.

I saw you often pass in these domains with an air that would charm me, and I was on this balcony that fatal day I started to perceive the first effects of my unfortunate passion. It seemed to me you wanted to charm me and though you did not know me, I persuaded myself that you had noticed me amidst all those that were with me. I imagined that when you halted you were quite happy to allow me to see you better so that I might admire your skill and good graces when riding your horse. A sense of fright took me by surprise when you made it pass a difficult tract, I was secretly interested in all your actions. I felt quite sure you were not indifferent to me, and I took for me all that you did. You know all too well what followed these beginnings and though I have nothing to hide, I must not write of this for fear of making you more guilty, if this is possible, and then to have to chide myself for making so many useless efforts to compel you to be faithful.

You will not be. Can I hope that my letters and my chiding will succeed to touch on your ingratitude when my love

and indulgence failed? I hold too many proofs to the contrary, your unjust ways leave me no reason to doubt, and I must fear the worst, since you have abandoned me. Will your charms win only myself? Will no other eyes find you pleasing? I think I would not be angry if affections found in others could, in some way, justify my own, and I would like that all the women of France found you charming, that none be charmed, and that none please you.

This design is useless and impossible and I have sufficiently experienced your lack of character to know that you will forget me without any help or without need for a new passion.

Maybe I want you to have some reasonable excuse? It is true that I would be more unhappy, but you would be less guilty. I can see that you will remain in France without need for great pleasures and of your own free will; Does the fatigue of a long voyage, some semblance of propriety, the fear you may not return my passion keep you? Ah! do not fear me. I will be content with seeing you from time to time and knowing simply that you and I are in one place. Maybe I flatter myself, and you will be more touched by the rejection and the severity of another than you were by my favors. Is it possible that harsh treatment will inflame you?

But before engaging in a great passion, think well on the excess of my pain, on the uncertainty of my plans, on the turmoil in my heart, on the extravagance of my letters, on my trustfulness, on my despair, on my wishes, on my

jealousy. Ah! You will render yourself miserable. I implore you, take heed, so that at least what I suffer may serve you in some way.

Five or six months ago you entrusted in me a woeful secret and you acknowledged all too candidly that you had loved another woman in your country. If she prevents you from returning, tell me without sparing so that I may cease to languish. Some fragment of hope sustains me still, and I would be relieved (should it have no tomorrow) to lose it truly and lose myself as well; send me her portrait with a few of her letters, and write me all that she tells you. Maybe I will find reasons to console myself or to afflict me greater. I cannot remain long in my present state, there is no change that would not be favorable. I would also like the portrait of your brother and of your sister-in-law; all that means something to you is to me most precious and I am entirely devoted to everything that touches you. I am left with nothing of myself. There are moments when it seems I could even serve the one you love. Your bad treatment and your disdain have broken me so thoroughly that I dare not even believe it possible to think I could be jealous and yet not displease you, and I believe I do the greatest harm in the world to fault you. I am often convinced that I should not let you see with such fury, as I do, feelings you disavow.

An officer has long been waiting for your letter, I was determined to write it in such a fashion so that you may receive it without aversion, but it is too extravagant, it must

be finished. Alas: It is not within my power to bring myself to do this, it seems to me I speak to you when I write, and that you are more present. The next one will not be as long or as troublesome, you will be able to open and read it with this assurance; it is true, I must not speak of a passion which displeases you, and I will speak of it no more.

It will be a year in a few days since I gave myself to you without reserve, your passion seemed to me very ardent and sincere and I never would have thought that my favors would so annoy you as to force you to travel five hundred leagues and that you would rather encounter shipwrecks only to flee from me; I did not deserve such treatment. You can remember my modesty, my shame, and my confusion, but you do not remember what made you love me in spite of yourself.

The officer who will bring you this letter reminds me for the fourth time that he must leave. How he is pressing. He is abandoning no doubt some other unfortunate woman in this country.

Adieu, I have more difficulty in finishing my letter than you had in leaving me, possibly forever. Adieu, I dare not whisper a thousand tender names, or abandon myself freely to my wayward passion. I love you a thousand times more than my life, and a thousand times more than I can think. How you are dear to me and how you are cruel! You do not write, I could not stop myself from telling you this as well; I will start again and the officer will leave; what of it if he leaves? I write

more for myself than for you, I try only to soothe myself, it is as well, the length of my letter will scare you and you will not read it. What have I done to be so miserable? And why have you poisoned my life? Would that I was born in some other country! Adieu, Forgive me! I no longer dare ask you to love me; see to what extent fate has reduced me! Adieu.

III

(circa January or February 1668)

What will become of me and what do you want me to do? I find myself quite estranged from all I had imagined; I had hoped you would write to me from wherever you went and that your letters would be exceedingly long; that you would sustain my passion with hopes of seeing you again, that an absolute trust in your loyalty would provide me with some rest; and that I would remain all the same in a tolerable state without extreme afflictions; I had even contrived a few feeble plots to make, as much I could, able efforts to cure myself, if only I knew with certainty you had well forgotten me. Your absence, the distance between us, some stirrings of devotion, the fear of ruining entirely the rest of my health through so many sleepless nights and so many worries, the little hope of your ever returning, the coldness of your passion and of your last good-byes, your departure founded on such weak excuses, and a thousand other reasons, that are only too good, and too useless, seemed to promise me some help, if it became necessary. Having only myself to struggle with, I could not trust my weaknesses, nor apprehend all I suffer today. Alas! How I deserve to be pitied for not sharing my sorrows with you, and for being the only one with pain. This thought kills me and I die of fright thinking you may have never been sentient to all our pleasures.

Yes, I now perceive the ill faith of all your actions: you betrayed me every time you said you were thrilled to be alone with me. I owe your attentiveness and loving transports only to my importunities. In cold blood you made the design to inflame me, you saw my passion only as a conquest and your heart was never deeply touched. Are you not very unhappy and do you possess so little grace that you knew only to employ my emotions thus? And how can it be that with such love I could not make you truly happy? I regret out of love for you, the infinite pleasures you have lost; can it be that you did not want to relish them. Ah! To know them, you would doubtless find that they are more delicate than the pleasure of deceit and you would have discovered that we are far happier, and that we feel something far more touching, when we love violently, than when we are loved.

I do not know who I am, what I do, or what I desire; I am torn by a thousand contrary emotions. Can one imagine so deplorable a state? I love you to distraction, and I care for you enough, not to dare, perhaps, wish upon you the same torments; I would kill myself, or I would die of grief without the need to kill myself, were I told you know no rest, that your life is filled with turmoil and confusion, that you cry endlessly, and that everything is odious to you. I can barely tend my ills. How could I endure a pain born out of yours, would it not be for me a thousand times more harrowing?

Yet, I cannot resign myself to wish that you think of me no more; and to speak sincerely, I am furiously jealous of all

that brings you joy, and of what touches your heart and your taste in France. I do not know why I write to you. I can see that you will only pity me and I do not want your pity.

I am so angry at myself when I think of all I sacrificed for you: I have lost my reputation, I exposed myself to my family's fury, to the severity of this country's laws against nuns, moreover to your ingratitude, which seems to me to be the greatest of my woes. And yet, I can see that my remorse is not real, that in earnest, I would have liked, for love of you, to have encountered greater dangers, and that I take a morbid pleasure in having risked my life and honor for you. All I hold most precious, should it not have been at your disposal? And should I not be satisfied for having employed it thus? It even seems to me that I am not happy with my pains or the excess of my love, even if I cannot, Alas! flatter myself enough to be pleased with you. I live, infidel that I am, and do more to preserve my life than I do to lose it.

Ah! I die of shame. Is my despair hence only in my letters? If I loved you as I have told you a thousand times should I not now be dead? I cheated you. It is you who must cast blame on me. Alas! Why do you not blame me? I saw you leave, I cannot hope to see you ever again, and still I breathe. I have betrayed you. I ask forgiveness. But do not grant it! Treat me severely! Do not think my feelings violent enough! Be more difficult to please: bid me I should die of

love for you. I beg you to provide me with this cure, so that I may surmount the weakness of my sex, and end my uncertainties with true despair; a tragic end would no doubt compel you to think of me most often, you would hold fond memories of me, and you would be, perchance, greatly touched by so extraordinary a death. Is death not worth more than the state to which you have reduced me? Adieu, I wish I had never seen you. Ah! I strongly feel the falsehood of this sentiment, and I realize as I write that I would rather be unhappy loving you than never to have seen you; I thus consent without a sigh to my ill-made destiny since you have chosen not to better it. Adieu, promise to miss me tenderly, should I die of pain, and that at least the violence of my passion provide you with an aversion and disgust for all things. This solace will suffice me, but if I must abandon you forever, I would not like to leave you to another. Would you not be very cruel to use my despair so as to render yourself more engaging, and to have it known that you aroused the greatest passion in the world?

Adieu once again, my letters are too long, I lack consideration, I beg your pardon, and I dare hope that you will make allowances for a poor senseless girl, who did not used to be thus, as well you know, before she loved you.

Adieu. It seems I speak too often of my unbearable condition. And yet I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the despair you cause me and I loathe the quietude in which I lived before I knew you. Adieu, my passion grows with each and every moment. Ah! So many things to tell you!

IV

(Written after June 3, 1668.)

I feel I wrong the feelings in my heart when I try and have you understand them when I write. How happy I would be if you could measure my feelings against the violence of your own!

But I cannot rely on you in this, and I cannot help telling you, far less vividly than I feel, that you should not ill treat me as you do with a shameful neglect that plunges me into despair, and is even shameful to yourself; it is only just that I be allowed to complain of woes I had well predicted when I found you resolved to leave me. I now realize that I deceived myself when I thought you would behave with more propriety than that to which one is accustomed, because it seemed the fervor of my love raised me above all possible suspicion and deserved more fidelity than ordinarily found. But the measures you take to betray me prevail at last on the justice you owe to everything I have done for you. I would be most unhappy to discover you loved me only because I love you and I would want to owe everything only to your heart's inclination; but I am so far from being in this state for I have not received one single letter from you for six months past.

I attribute all this misfortune to the blind abandonment with which I grew attached to you. Should I have not foreseen that my pleasures would end long before my love? Could I hope that you would remain in Portugal all of your life, and that you would renounce your fortune and your

country to think only of me? My suffering finds no relief, and the remembrance of my pleasures fills me with despair.

What! All my desires will thus be useless, and never again will I see you in my room with all the ardor and exuberance you had me see? Alas! I mock myself, and I now realize that the emotions that occupied my mind and my heart were in you borne only of a few short pleasures that ended with them. Whilst in these pleasurable moments I should have called my reason to my side to have it moderate the dire excess of my bliss and to announce all I suffer now. But I was yours, and I was in no state to think of what could poison my joy, and forbid me from delighting fully in the ardent expression of your passion. I took too great a pleasure in being with you to think that you would one day be far away from me.

I do remember all the same having told you on some occasion that you would render me unhappy, but these fears would quickly dissipate, and I delighted in surrendering to the enchantment and ill faith of your protestations.

I know well the remedy to all my ills, and I should soon be free of them should I cease to love you. But alas! What remedy is this! No, I much prefer to suffer even greater ills than to forget you. Alas, does this depend on me? I cannot blame myself for having wished even once not to love you. You are more to pity than I am, and it is better to suffer all that I suffer than to revel in languishing pleasures provided

by your mistresses in France. I do not envy your indifference, and I feel sorry for you. I defy you to forget me completely, I hold that without me you can but know imperfect pleasures, and I am happier than you for I am better occupied. They have made me, recently, doorkeeper in this convent. All those that speak to me think me mad. I do not know what it is I answer them, and the nuns must be as mad as I to have thought me capable of such work.

Oh how I envy Manoel and Francisco's happiness,[3] why am I not, as they, incessantly with you? I would have followed you, and I would have assuredly served you with more heart. I wish for nothing in this world but to see you. At least remember me. I am content if you remember me, but I dare not be sure even of this, I did not restrict my hopes to you remembering me when I saw you everyday. But you have taught me well that I must be subject to your will. Yet, I do not repent having adored you. I am glad you seduced me. Your cruel absence, and possibly eternal, does not abate the passion of my love! I want for all the world to know it; I do not make a mystery of it, and I am happy to have done all I have done for you against all sense of propriety. My honor and religion is now in loving you fervently all my life, since I have begun to love you.

I do not tell you all these things so you will write. Ah! do not feel obliged. I want from you only what will come from your heart, and I refuse all other signs of love which you

could control. I will find pleasure in forgiving you, for you may find pleasure in not taking pains to write, and I feel a deep desire to forgive you all your faults.

This morning, a French officer had the kindness to speak of you for more than three hours. He told me that peace in France has been concluded. If this is so, could you not come and see me and take me to France? But I do not deserve it. Do what will please you; my love herewith does not depend on how you will treat me. Since you have left, I have not had one moment of good health, and I find no other pleasure than in speaking your name a thousand times a day. A few nuns who know the deplorable state in which you have put me, speak of you most often; I leave my room, where you so often came, as little as is possible, and I look forever at your portrait. It is a thousand times more dear to me than life. It gives me some pleasure; but it gives me much pain as well when I think that I may never see you again; why must it be that I may never see you again? Have you abandoned me forever? I am so desperate, your poor Mariana cannot stand much more, she faints in finishing this letter. Adieu, Adieu, please have pity on me.

V

(June 1668)

I write to you for the last time, and I hope to have you know by the difference of terms and by the manner of this letter, that you have at last persuaded me that you no longer love me and so, I must love you no more. Thus I will send back by first dispatch all I still retain of yours. Do not fear I may write; I will not even write your name on top of the parcel. I have entrusted all these details to Dona Brites, who was wont to carry secrets far removed from these. I will be less suspicious of her troubles than of my own. She will take all necessary precautions to ensure that you receive the portrait and the bracelets you gave me. Yet, I want you to know that for some days now, I have felt the urge to burn and tear to pieces these tokens of your love once so dear to me, but I have in the past shown such weakness that you would never have believed me capable of such extremities. Hence, I want to revel in the pain I had in parting with them, and provide you at least with some vexation. I confess, to my shame and to yours, that I found myself more attached to these trifles than I would care to say, and I felt the need again to call on my reflections to rid myself of each one in particular, even as I flattered myself in thinking I no longer loved you, but in the end we can convince ourselves of anything given sufficient cause.

I have put them in the hands of Dona Brites; how this cost me in tears. After countless doubts and a thousand reservations unknown to you and with which I will surely not acquaint you, I begged her never to speak of them, never to give them back, even though I might ask to see them once again, and to send them off, at last, without forewarning me.

I came to know the extent of my love only now I have tried my best to cure myself of it, and I fear I would not have dared attempt this had I foreseen such strife and such violence. I am convinced it would have cost me less pain to keep loving you, ingrate though you are, than to leave you forever. I have come to know that you meant less to me than my passion, and I met with strange sorrows while combating it, once your injurious ways rendered you odious to me.

The ordinary pride of my sex did not help my resolve to turn against you. Alas! I suffered your contempt, I would have endured your hatred and all the jealousy born out of your possible attachment for another, I would have had, at least, some passion to combat, but your indifference is unbearable, your impertinent protestations of friendship and the ridiculous civilities of your last letter have shown me that you received all those I wrote to you and that they caused no stirrings in your heart though you have read them all.

Ingrate, I am still fool enough to feel despair at being deprived of the hope I had that they may not have reached you, and were kept from you. I loathe your facile faith. Had I asked you to acquaint me with a sincere truth? Why not leave

me my passion? You had only not to write. I did not seek to be enlightened; am I not miserable enough, having failed in making you take some care to deceive me, and no longer being able to excuse you?

Know that I now perceive you are unworthy of my sentiments, and that I know all your cruel qualities. Yet (if all I have done for you merits that you give some small consideration to the favors I ask), I beseech you, write to me no more, and help me forget you entirely. Should you let me know, however faintly, that you felt some dismay in reading this letter, I would perhaps believe you and perhaps also your acknowledgment and your consent would vex and anger me and all this could inflame me. Thus do not interfere with my ways, you would no doubt upset all my plans, whichever way you entered into them.

I do not wish to know the success of this letter. Do not trouble the state for which I am preparing, I am sure you can be satisfied with the ills you cause me, whatever your designs were in rendering me miserable. Do not free me of my uncertainties. I hope to make of them, with time, something more tranquil. I promise not to hate you. I mistrust violent sentiments far too greatly to dare embark upon hate.

I am convinced that I may find in this country a lover more faithful and better made; but, alas! who will grant me love? Will the passion of another satisfy me? Did mine ever hold any power over you?

Will I not learn that a loving heart once affected never forgets the one who quickened emotions unknown and unattainable till then? That all its impulses belongs to its first love. That its first thoughts, its first wounds cannot be cured or blotted. That all these passions that offer help and that take pains to renew and content, promise feelings the heart can no longer experience? That all the pleasures it seeks with no real wish to find them, only serve to show that nothing is more dear to it than the remembrance of its pain?

Why have you taught me the imperfection and unpleasantness of a bond not meant to be eternal and all the hardships that follow violent love when it is unrequited? Why must blind inclination and cruel destiny have us commonly pursue those who desire others? Even if I could hope for some amusement in a new tryst, and found someone of good faith, I pity myself so greatly, that I would feel great scruples to reduce the worst man on earth to a state like the one to which you have brought me. And though I am under no obligation to spare you, I cannot bring myself to exert on you such a cruel vengeance, even if it came from me, by a change I do not foresee.

I seek in this moment to excuse you. I grant a nun does not normally inspire love. Yet it seems to me that were men capable of reason in their choices, they should attach themselves to nuns rather than to other women. Nothing prevents nuns from reflecting incessantly on their passion, they are not distracted by a thousand things that dissipate

and occupy the world. It must be very unpleasant to see the one we love always seduced by a thousand trifles, and one must be greatly insensitive to suffer, without distress, that they speak forever of assemblies, clothing, and promenades. One is forever exposed to new jealousies, women are forever obliged to please, indulge and converse; who can be sure that they dislike such duties and that they service their husbands with extreme distaste and against their will? How they must distrust a lover who never questions, who easily believes and who sees them with much trust and tranquility carry out these duties.

But I do not seek pretences to prove with logic that you should have loved me; these are mean devices, and I have employed much better without success. I seize upon my fate too well to try and overcome it; I will be miserable all my life; was I not thus when I saw you every day? I died of fright that you might not be faithful. I wanted to see you at every moment and this was not possible; I was troubled by the perils you ran when entering this convent. I did not live when you were at war, I was in despair not to be more beautiful or more worthy of you; I muttered against the mediocrity of my condition, I often thought the attachment you appeared to have for me would harm you in some way; it seemed I did not love you enough, I was fearful for you of my parent's anger,[4] I was in truth in the same pitiable state I am at present.

Had you provided me with some mark of passion since leaving Portugal, I would have made every effort to escape, I

would have disguised myself to go and find you. Alas! What would have become of me had you shown no concern for me once I was in France? What confusion! What aberration! What shame for my family, who I hold dear now I no longer love you. You can see I allow calmly that I could have been in a more pitiable state than I am now. I speak to you reasonably at least once in my life. How my moderation will please you, and how you will commend me. I do not want to know, I have begged you write to me no more and I entreat you once again to do so.

Have you never reflected on how you treated me? Do you ever think that you owe me more than to any one else on earth? I loved you like a mad woman: what contempt I had for all things! Your doings are not those of an honest man; you must have had for me some natural aversion not to love me madly, and I let myself be charmed by very mediocre qualities indeed; what did you do to please me? What sacrifices were yours for me? Did you not pursue a thousand other pleasures? Did you renounce gambling and your hunts? Were you not the first to leave for war? Did you not return the last? You foolishly exposed yourself to danger though I begged you to be careful out of your love for me. You did not seek ways to establish yourself in Portugal where you were esteemed. A letter from your brother had you leave without hesitation and did I not learn that during the voyage you were of the best disposition

in the world? One must aver I am obliged to mortally detest you.

Ah! I have wreaked my own misfortunes; firstly I accustomed you with too much sincerity to a great passion, one must affect artifice to be loved; one must seek ingenious ways to inflame and love alone does not yield love. You wanted me to love you, and as you had formed designs you would stop at nothing to obtain me. You would have even loved me had this proven necessary. But you came to know you could succeed in your enterprise without passion, you had no need for it. What perfidy! Did you truly believe you could deceive me forever with impunity?

Should chance bring you back to this country I tell you I would deliver you up to my parent's vengeance. I have lived too long in an abandonment and an idleness that horrifies me and my remorse persecutes me with relentless rigour. I feel too clearly the shame of the crimes you had me commit and no longer bear, alas, the passion that precluded me from knowing its depravity. When will my heart cease to be torn, when shall I be delivered from this cruel confusion?

However, I believe I do not wish you harm and could even consent to you being happy. But how can this be if your heart be well made? I want to write another letter to let you know that I will be more calm once some time has passed. How I will relish condemning your unjust ways once they no longer hurt me, saying I despise you and speaking

with much indifference of your betrayal, forgetting all my pleasures and my pains, remembering you only if I so desire.

I grant, you still hold a great advantage over me, that you filled me with a passion that made me lose my mind; but you must not flatter yourself. I was young. I was gullible. They had locked me up in this convent since childhood. I had seen only unpleasant people, I had never known incessant praises before yours. It seemed to me, I owed you the charms and beauty you found in me and had me uncover. I heard good things said of you, everyone spoke in your favor, you did everything to inspire my love.

But finally the spell is broken. You were of great assistance and I confess I had great need for it. In sending back your letters, I will carefully keep the last two you wrote to me and I will reread them again more often than I read the first ones, so that I may not fall prey to my weaknesses. How they cost me dearly and how I would have loved for you to let me love you always. I realize I am still too preoccupied with my chiding and your infidelity, but remember that I have promised myself a more peaceful state and that I will succeed, or I will take against myself some extreme measure which you will learn without much interest. But I want nothing from you; I am mad always to speak of the same things. I must leave you, and no longer think of you, I even think I will write to you no more. Am I obliged to provide you with an exact account of all my varied emotions?

THE LETTERS

1. (p. 89) In Barbin's edition from this point on, Mariana passes from the familiar "tu" (you) in French, to the more formal "vous" (thou). The Portuguese language did not use the "thou" and it is most likely that Guilleragues or Barbin decided to use the "thou" going forward. Portuguese translators simply restore the letters to the "you," but French scholars who believe the letters were written by Guilleragues debate whether if in the first sentence, Mariana is admonishing love—the concept—or Chamilly the lover.

2. (p. 97) Those in favor of the letters being a work of fiction use this supposed geographical mistake to make their case. The sentence is easily explained if one accepts that Mariana referred to the Mertola gate or portal, fifty paces away.

3. (p. 109) Two little Portuguese lackeys (note from Barbin's original edition). The Portuguese scholar Manuel Ribeiro discovered that Balthazar subsequently hired a servant Manoel, he believes used to be the one who worked for Chamilly.

4. (p. 115) Only Mariana's father was alive at this point but Mariana uses the Portuguese meaning that includes family members.